

THE PALIMPSEST

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Daniel Walter Morehouse

Herbert Spencer once asserted that capacity to work according to plan is what distinguishes animals in the scale of intelligence. Man is superior to other animals in that he can foresee more remote consequences of present action and therefore plan farther in advance. That which is true of the race applies likewise to the individual, and the mark of an intelligent man is his ability to plan the course of his life with the longest perspective and work most consistently toward his preconceived goal.

This generalization not only epitomizes but evaluates the life of Daniel Walter Morehouse, one of Iowa's most noted citizens. Furthermore, it may be truthfully said that he was a distinguished scientist and educator, as well as a sincere and devout churchman and a true Christian gentleman. The nobility of his character was widely recognized, and he was ever a loyal friend, confidant, and adviser of the many who knew and

loved him well, and who now so faithfully cherish his memory. What more need be said of any man?

Daniel Morehouse was born in a rough cabin at Mankato, Minnesota, on February 22, 1876, sharing the birth date of the "Father of his Country", on the centennial year of national independence. Soon afterward he moved with his parents to Grant County, South Dakota, where he spent his childhood and received his early education.

A rigorous climate and pioneer living provided him with a remarkable physique and a constitution which later enabled him to perform prodigious quantities of work, to the admiration and dismay of his friends and colleagues. His vitality was such, however, that he was frequently tempted to overtax his bodily strength, especially in later years, to the detriment of his own physical well being.

Education early became his ruling passion. His eighteenth year found him teaching country school in the vicinity of his home in South Dakota. In the following year he entered Northwestern Christian College at Excelsior, Minnesota, where he studied for two years before transferring to Drake University in 1897. He little dreamed then that he would be associated with that institution during the remainder of his life.

His student days were normal. While busily engaged with various college activities, he was also confronted with the more prosaic problems of earning his college expenses. He "rose to the dizzy eminence of steward of a boarding club", and worked in a clothing store. This latter experience was significant, for as a man he was always immaculately dressed and made an impressive appearance in public.

The attractive personality of Daniel Morehouse was evident while he was in college, for it was agreed that "he was a likeable chap". He was a member of the Athens Literary Society, held various class offices including the presidency, and played center on the football team of 1898, which claimed the championship of six States. The horseshoe that became a talisman of victory at Drake was originally found by Morehouse on the morning before the Thanksgiving Day game in which Drake beat Grinnell eighteen to sixteen and thereby confirmed the superiority of the 1898 team. In later years his interest in athletics never waned; he was a member of the faculty committee on athletics, he was influential in building the Drake field house, and he was active in promoting the famous Drake Relays.

It is said that his interest in astronomy began "when a neighbor asked him to translate some

Latin references in an astronomy text". Young Morehouse not only translated the material, but kept the book to read about the movements of the stars and their relations to the lives of men. Perhaps the numerous events of major astronomical importance which occurred during his early manhood also helped to awaken his devotion to astronomy which grew in him progressively as the years passed.

He graduated from the Drake college of letters and science in 1900, receiving the Bachelor of Science degree. He must have been a good student for in the following autumn he began teaching physics and astronomy at his Alma Mater, which duty, except while absent for graduate work, he never entirely relinquished. In later years, when his time and energy were almost wholly absorbed by administrative duties, he was yet at heart primarily interested in astronomy and teaching, which were ever his foremost joys. "I believe he was never happier than when in his observatory," said his friend Dr. Philip Fox, "though not infrequently these happy hours were stolen from the few he should have allowed himself for rest."

He continued to work for his higher degrees. In 1902 his study at the University of Chicago earned him the Bachelor of Science degree from

that institution, and in the same year Drake gave him the Master of Science degree. His character and scholarship being well demonstrated, he was promoted to the rank of professor of physics and astronomy. With this assurance of a successful career he married Myrtle Slayton of Des Moines on June 9, 1903, to which union three children were born — a son Charles and two daughters, Vega and Frances. Even in the naming of his children his interest in astronomy was evident, for Vega is the name of one of the brightest stars in the firmament.

During many summers he worked toward his doctorate, principally at the University of Chicago. While doing graduate work at the Yerkes Observatory in 1908, he discovered the famous comet which bears his name. This event won for him the distinction which opened many doors. The academic year 1911-12 found him continuing his graduate studies and serving as an instructor in the University of California, where he received his Doctor of Philosophy degree in 1914. His thesis was "The Orbit of the Seventh Satellite of Jupiter".

Throughout the remainder of his life, he received other honorary degrees and some notable distinctions. He was a member of Phi Beta Kappa and Sigma Xi. Later he became a member

of the American Astronomical Society, the British Astronomical Association, the Royal Astronomical Society, and the Iowa State Academy of Science, of which he was president in 1921-22. The honor that is the best testimony of his ability and reputation as an astronomer came in 1930 when he was elected chairman of the astronomical division of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Though he was not primarily a research astronomer, Dr. Morehouse served astronomy well by creating among his students and friends a deep and abiding interest in the subject. This does not mean that his own work was superficial, but only that he approached astronomy from a different viewpoint from that of the research scientists. His election to the national chairmanship in his field attested that astronomers respected him as much as his friends and students loved him. Characteristically his address as chairman to his scientific colleagues was on "Astronomy's Contribution to the Stream of Human Thought". In 1932 Butler University conferred upon him the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws.

Dr. Morehouse's life was unique in that he was a man of many careers, and it might truthfully be said that he was almost equally successful in all of them. He began as a teacher, and he remained a

teacher at heart even after becoming an administrator. During the early period of his career he carried a heavy teaching load — in some years giving courses in mathematics as well as physics and astronomy. He taught astronomy in such a way as to fascinate students, avoiding the highly mathematical and theoretical aspects of the subject that would interest only specialists. As an executive he never entirely gave up his teaching. Perhaps he had only a small class or two in astronomy or a seminar, but all the while he wanted to be in direct contact with the students.

In 1919 he was made dean of men at Drake, a position he held until he became dean of the college of liberal arts in 1922. A year later he was chosen president of the University and continued to serve as dean of liberal arts until 1930. His tenure as president lasted nearly nineteen years, for he served as acting president in 1922 and held the office until his death in 1941. Dean Morehouse, as he was always respectfully called by those who knew him best, was an appellation he never entirely lost, even while president. Under his direction the University prospered greatly, both from the material and the academic standpoint. His administration began soon after the dedication of the Drake University Municipal Observatory for which he was responsible, but

the new stadium, field house, women's dormitory, Cowles library, and men's dormitory and student union were built while he was president. The completion of each new building was in turn a proud and happy moment in the life of President Morehouse. Each is a substantial testimonial of the time and energy spent in behalf of the University by its courageous and tireless leader. Each is also the evidence of his ability as a business man in building up the physical resources of his institution.

Both as an executive and a teacher, he stood high in the councils of educators the country over. For years he was a member of the State Board of Educational Examiners, and he was active in the Iowa College Presidents Association. He served as chairman of an advisory committee appointed by the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools in 1938. Most persons will remember Dr. Morehouse as an astronomer, for his astronomical career was brilliant and his reputation was wide. As a student he associated with and was respected by many of the greatest American astronomers of his time. His work as a teacher, comet discoverer, and builder and director of the Drake Municipal Observatory were of a high order. Lack of time hampered his research and publication. How reluctant he must have

been to allow more pressing duties to crowd out those things which were most interesting to him.

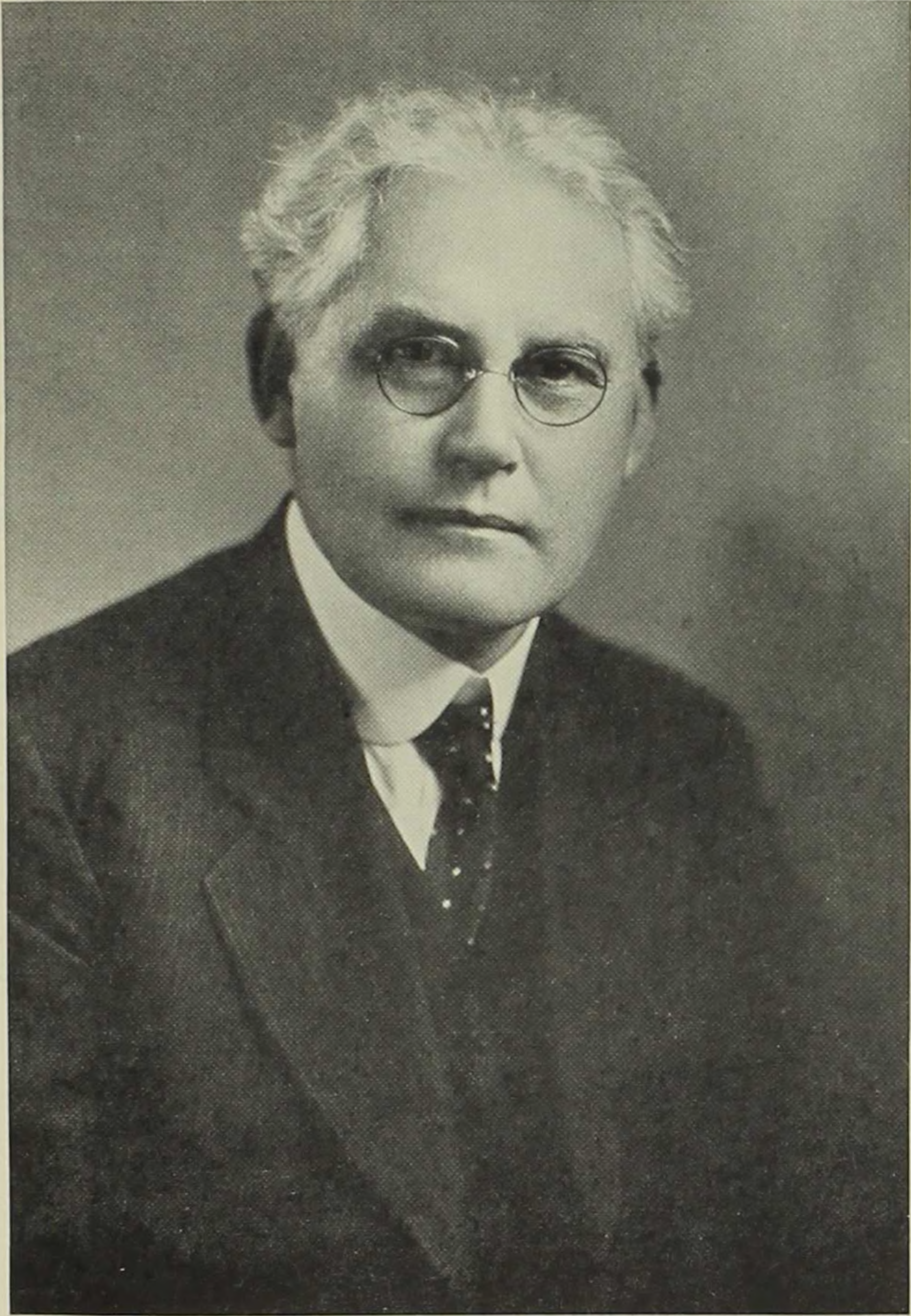
Even so, he found time to "observe" and to keep in close touch with things astronomical. Among his many outstanding experiences were the four total solar eclipse expeditions in which he participated. These were to Matheson, Colorado, in 1918; to Catalina Island in 1923; to Giggleswick, England, in 1927; and to Island Pond, Vermont, in 1931. While in England he was entertained by many distinguished individuals and honored with an interview in the *London Times*. In Paris he was the guest of the great Flammarion, famous French mathematician and astronomer, and at the University of Heidelberg, Max Wolf, one of the most noted of living astronomers, was his host. He was present in 1934 on the occasion of the pouring of the great disk for the 200-inch telescope mirror at the Corning Glass Works in New York. To one who understood the value of such an instrument this must have been one of the most interesting experiences of his lifetime.

As a popular lecturer on astronomy, few persons were the equal of Dr. Morehouse. He always impressed his hearers. As one put it, "He showed many of us a new heaven and a new earth — a new universe." People who visited his

Municipal Observatory were fascinated by his descriptions of the constellations in the sky. For many years he appeared regularly on the program of the American School of Wild Life Protection at McGregor. Whenever he was guest lecturer at the Adler Planetarium in Chicago, he was always very popular. It was stated by the director that there were more inquiries and requests for his return than for almost any other lecturer. During the summer of 1930 he was guest director of the Planetarium.

In spite of his busy life he somehow found time for astronomical research, and his contributions to the literature in that field were many and varied. Dr. Fox, in the biographical sketch he wrote for *Popular Astronomy*, listed several articles which he evidently considered most important. These indicate the wide range of Dr. Morehouse's astronomical interests. Had he been able to devote his life entirely to astronomy, the products of his research would have been much more extensive.

For his tireless efforts in the field of education, for his advancement of Drake University, and for his many contributions to local improvement he was given the community award by the Des Moines *Tribune* in 1928 for rendering most distinguished service to the city of Des Moines. He had many city associations, being a Mason and a



COURTESY OF DRAKE UNIVERSITY

DANIEL WALTER MOREHOUSE

member of the Prairie Club, the Des Moines Club, the University Club, and Rotary. No doubt his interest in civic welfare weighed heavily with the board of judges, but they remembered specifically his part in establishing the Drake Municipal Observatory in Waveland Park in 1921 and recognized that it was his influence which persuaded the American Association for the Advancement of Science to meet in Des Moines in 1929.

No sketch of Dr. Morehouse's life would be complete without mention of his Christian character and his contributions to the church. He was ever a loyal churchman, devout and unstinting in his service. His zealous work in behalf of the University Church left the influence of his character indelibly upon it, helping to make it one of the outstanding churches of the denomination in America. He also contributed much time and energy to the affairs of the Church of Christ at large, with which denomination Drake University, though nominally non-sectarian, has been most closely affiliated. He was elected president of the international convocation of the Disciples of Christ in Des Moines in 1934, and in the following year he was a delegate to the international convocation in England. While there he was entertained by many prominent persons. At Cambridge he visited in the home of the eminent

English historian, J. Holland Rose, and a photograph taken there was among the most prized mementoes of his trip.

Dr. Morehouse's arduous duties never diminished. On the contrary, his responsibilities only accumulated. This was particularly true of his presidency of Drake University during the years of the depression, when incomes on investments dwindled while expenses tended to increase. The school dared not mark time. New buildings were needed, new endowment had to be secured, and faculty members had to be recruited. All the multifarious duties of management required time, strength, and energy. Many of his most intimate friends felt that President Morehouse was overtaxing himself, but those who knew him best also knew that he would never shirk a duty nor avoid responsibility. "He just wasn't built that way."

As a result, he died too young — at the very peak of his career. Some years prior to his passing it was known that his heart had become impaired, due to illness which left him in a weakened condition. From this he rallied, but never again did he entirely regain his former strength and vigor. He was able to carry on some of his administrative duties, but most of his travel and extra activities had to be curtailed. In September, 1940, he was stricken with pneumonia. His weak-

ened heart made recovery impossible, and he passed away peacefully at his home on January 21, 1941, in his sixty-fifth year.

News of his death spread as a pall over the community and, by means of press and radio, wherever he was known. Evidence of the high esteem in which he was held came in the form of hundreds of letters and telegrams sent to Mrs. Morehouse and the University. The message from John Scholte Nollen, President Emeritus of Grinnell College, is typical. "Dr. Morehouse had a rare combination of good qualities — as an eminent scientist with a gift of administration, and a genius for friendship, and a commanding personality that inspired respect, loyalty, and affection. We can ill afford to lose such a leader in science, education, and religion."

His body lay in state in the Drake University Chapel with a guard of honor composed of students, and thousands of townspeople, students, and friends solemnly viewed the remains. Impressive services were held in University Church. Warm tributes were given by representatives of the many interests with which he was so closely identified in life. Perhaps Dr. Marvin O. Sansbury, representing the church, expressed these sentiments best when he said: "Dr. Morehouse was such a kind, patient, gracious Christian gen-

tleman. To be a Christian had real meaning for him and often he said, 'To be a Christian should be the eternal quest of mankind. The Church is the instrumentality by which men attain this goal. We may come pitifully short of this eternal quest, but the humiliation and disappointment are to those who neglect, or never attempt the way.' Science helped Dr. Morehouse to discern God and he helped many others to find science as one of the avenues that lead to the Almighty. For him, 'Science was perhaps the clearest revelation of God in our Age'."

His ashes have been placed at his request in an urn which rests in a niche in the rotunda of the Drake Municipal Observatory where he spent so many happy hours in study, meditation, and research. In spirit he may now look down from the stars to this place of his handiwork, where he once so reverently looked up into those heavens which declared to him the glory of the God he loved so well.

BEN HUR WILSON